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A VOICE FROM GERMANY

To know the real mind of the German people with whom we are at war would be of immense advantage to our country at the present time. What thoughts are seething in the brains of the sixty-odd million German civilians; to what extent have they believed in the ambitious designs of their rulers or approved the despicable methods employed by them in waging their contest for world mastery; what distinction, if any, can properly be made between the Imperial Government and the German people—these are questions fraught with vast significance to the entire allied world.

We present in the following pages some contribution, slight though it may be, toward answering these questions. Much water has run under the bridge since 1914, and it does not necessarily follow that German public opinion is the same today as it was in the opening year of the war. Nevertheless, accurate knowledge of what the German people really felt and hoped for at that time is essential to the passing of correct judgment upon the whole set of issues which center around Germany's course in the war. From this point of view the letter which follows is believed to possess other than mere academic interest.

The intimate character and the serious tone of the letter are self-evident. It was written to a cousin in Wisconsin. The writer was a prosperous manufacturer, a "Herr Kommerzienrat," much of whose trade, prior to the war, was with England. He had repeatedly visited that country, and is said to have been "under ordinary conditions a very good-hearted, jovial fellow." The letter is believed by its recipient to express excellently the viewpoint and state of mind in the early days of the war of the class to which the writer belonged. In the mind of the American reader, it will tend to strengthen the conviction, we believe, that short of abject submission to

Prussianism there can be no real peace in the world until the German people are beaten into a state of mind which will lead them permanently to eschew the entire set of ideas which the term "Prussianism" connotes.

The translation of the letter into English has been done by Mrs. Kate E. Levi of the Wisconsin Historical Library.

Cologne, Dec. 27th [1914]

DEAR COUSIN GEORGE:

For a long time we have been waiting for some message from you and your family. Our aged Uncle Dierlam and his daughter Louise, whenever we met, always inquired whether I had heard anything from America. They were anxious to know whether you and your sons had reached home in safety.

Finally, your letter of Oct. 30th came yesterday and brought us very interesting news. I thank you most heartily for your complete information, and before all else, I wish to express our sincere sympathy with you and your loved ones for the sorrow which has come upon your family. Likewise I wish to thank you for the fine photographs which are well done and which delighted us exceedingly; also for the English brochure which we will read within a few days.

You can easily understand that now everything is subordinate to the events of the Great War which has been forced upon us. We had not thought, when we left here in the spring, that political events would suddenly assume such a serious aspect.

One must have been intimately acquainted with the whole historical development of the last twenty years in Europe and must have closely followed events in order to form a correct idea of the systematic plans by which our jealous enemies, France, Russia, and England, have endeavored to shut us in and ruin us as a World Power. Though the diplomatic history of the recent great combination is a matter of violent controversy between the contending powers, and though our enemies are guilty of an astonishing amount of lying and deceit, yet one fact stands out clear and established both for us and for everyone who thinks honestly: namely, that the German people, their ancestors, our Emperor, and both the respon-

sible and the subordinate officers of the Government, *have not wished for this war*. For many years and even up to the last moment, they took the greatest pains to maintain the peace which for forty-four years they had so carefully guarded.

The attack of our enemies is the result of the machinations of King Edward of England, of national hate and of industrial and political jealousy. Fear of the growing commercial and industrial strength and importance of Great Germany was the incentive to war on the part of our enemies. With France, there is hate in some measure, since by their defeat in 1870, the French people were humiliated in their colossal conceit and pride and for many years have nourished revengeful feelings. With many billions has France bought Russia as an ally, and these uncivilized Asiatics, desiring to take possession of Constantinople and Asia Minor, have armed themselves for a long time by means of French gold, and made systematic preparations for this war. Now, it has come upon them at an undesirable time, when they are suffering from a failure of crops and from threatening revolution. That England, however, without reason, without necessity, only from commercial jealousy, from malice and anger because our Germany is progressing industrially, declared war against us,—that we regard as so base and underhanded that we can scarcely find words to express our indignation. The treacherous Britains wish to make the world believe that it was only the breaking of the neutrality of Belgium which caused them to form an alliance with France and Russia. But, meanwhile, documents of a different kind have been found by the German Government, which have established beyond a doubt the fact that England, Belgium, and France have, for some time, been making arrangements for an attack upon us, and these facts were well known in our military circles. Should one, then, allow these enemies the first opportunity, or place much stress upon Belgian neutrality, while yet French fliers and officers in automobiles moved over Belgian territory long before our troops entered? There remained for us only one thing to do,—to be ready and to “outstrip” the enemy,—which fortunately we took good care to do. But, even after the French had ridden over Belgian boundaries, the German Government with entire courtesy asked the Belgians whether they

would permit the German army to march through the country; but they would not permit it, even with the assurance that no harm should come to any inhabitant, that we would pay full value for all we purchased, and that their country should remain uninjured. Since these requests were answered by a declaration of war on the part of Belgium, we also must proceed with force. Yet this we can affirm before the world,—that, likewise, after the taking of Lüttich and Namur, we again offered peace to Belgium in a chivalrous manner, and again without result.

So Belgium is the first sacrifice of English self-seeking politics and has indeed ceased to exist as an independent state. The second sacrifice will be France, and not even two million English soldiers can win back either in a short or long time the land which we have seized and intend to seize, in spite of the bombastic utterances of French statesmen, such as Viviani, about which we smile indulgently. This sort of people deceive themselves and ignore the plain facts. For raising their courage, they boast of their noble alliance, and how and when Germany will be defeated. Yet with all their attempts in the last days, to break through the German lines, they have met with colossal losses in dead and prisoners, terrible sacrifices—and they will experience yet more.

Of peace, nothing will be mentioned by us. When it is concluded, it must be honorable for us, and worthy of the sacrifices forced upon us. First when we have reckoned with the most contemptible and most despised of our enemies,—with England—(and that will give the key to the whole reckoning, which will astonish the world), then they may dare to mention peace to us. Until then we *hold ourselves ready for every sacrifice*. “Brittania rules the waves” will be a thing of the past. The Germans in the future will no longer allow the haughty Britains to make the rules and take the leading place upon the seas.

You can have no conception, dear George, of what bitterness, what hate toward England exists among us, especially since they have also caused the Japanese to turn against us. By that act, Great Britain has created, for generations to come, the most relentless enemies. Time will tell the consequences. There is no inhabitant of the German Kingdom who is not firmly convinced that to England,

and England alone, belongs the blame for this unholy and terrible war, since, without her participation, neither Russia nor France would have ventured to encounter us. Intelligent Frenchmen already understand that they are dupes, and, like all the Continental Powers who have allied themselves with England, are compelled to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for her. This time, we think, these chestnuts are burned, and John Bull may also burn his fingers a little. We have now dispensed with the French word "adieu" and address each other in welcome and departure only thus: "God punish England."

We have not entered the war to gain new territory. We fight for our national honor, and for our existence, and most nobly and wonderfully are our whole people preparing themselves for it.

Dear Cousin, one must have lived in it and taken part in it in order to understand our mobilizing during the first weeks after the declaration of the war. This transformation, to one who remembers only the past, is almost incomprehensible. Everything petty and common has disappeared. A spirit of sacrifice, a seriousness, an uplift came on that day such as one could not have dreamed of and this time will be a blessing to our people under all conditions.

We laugh at the word "militarism," which our enemies point out as that for which the whole world suffers. What would have happened to us, if we were not a people under arms—alert and ready to contend with the whole world? God be thanked that we must all pass through the good school of military service! Whoever has expressed himself at all on that point has regretted only this one thing—that we are not all completely equipped men, in actual service. We could then place two million more men in the field for the Fatherland, and would perchance have finished with our enemies three months earlier.

Our reserves are almost inexhaustible. Today there are more than two million young, healthy, and strong men not yet called, who await with impatience the chance to serve the Fatherland. Thus all the garrisons are filled and youths of eighteen and nineteen years are not yet called into service, as they are in France.

That Germany is financially in fine condition is well known. It appears certain that neutral states will have to suffer more on

account of the war than we ourselves. If you could look in upon us now, you would find that we live in the greatest contentment. All industries are in full operation. Above all, wages are good and there is no want, or loss of employment. We are surprised, ourselves, to see how smoothly everything moves along. The government takes care that there shall be no graft in food supplies. In the military storehouses, everything is provided for the support of our entire army for a year. This (our enemy) did not anticipate, and they can starve us as little as they can ruin us commercially. In northern France great quantities of wool and cotton were unexpectedly found, likewise in Belgium, which will tide over our home industries during the critical period. Recently, America has spoken somewhat more plainly with the brutal English, and will also be able to supply us with wool. We have long wondered that the United States submitted to this English dominance, and have regarded it as an indication of unfriendliness toward us, that our enemies receive immense quantities of war material from that source.

All the money which we spend remains in the land, which is a matter of inestimable value. We have the best resources of France, her chief industries, and the richest part of the country in our possession. Beautiful Belgium with its coal mines and all its wealth is in our hands, also pledges to the value of about forty billion marks, and I should like to know who can wrest them from us. All attempts of the English and French to do that are pitifully shattered, since they always repeat their bloody sacrifices. When we are ready in the East, we will utter a yet more emphatic word in the West.

To return again to "militarism" which our enemies lay such stress upon: I believe that America will wish for such a system of preparedness when once half a million Japanese have trod upon the soil of the Union. So far from stress and danger, one perhaps judges unjustly of our military system. But our geographical position has compelled us to adopt universal compulsory military service. Such a system is alike the school of serious work and fulfillment of duty, the foundation of order and punctuality and a leveller of social ranks—the most democratic institution of which one can conceive. The happiest recollections are connected with my military service; the truest bonds of friendship were formed there.

Our Emperor is no idol. We know that he is a man like us, with his weaknesses and failings. But to us he is the symbol of authority, the embodiment of the monarchical principle, which has proved itself most valuable. As a man, as a father, as a governor, and as a soldier, he serves as a model, and in republics with their corruption and the eternal struggle of parties for power, who serve only to enrich themselves as speedily as possible, we see no ideal. Poincaré, the President, was the greatest war baiter, while our Emperor up to the last moment tried to maintain peace. Under our constitutional monarchy in Germany we have a government more absolutely honorable, reliable, intelligent, uncorrupted, and honest than has ever been found in the world, and a model local and state government. In whatever pertains to civil freedom, we feel that we, by our system of order, honesty, and exactness, are just as fortunate as the freest Americans. That, only by the way, however.

We observe with regret that our enemies, by a real campaign of lying, intrigue, and defamation with all neutral states, seek to set us in the wrong, yet without being able to turn them against us. But we have a good conscience and in no case have done anything which would violate the people's rights, or the principles of humanity. For that our people are too highly gifted in good nature and too well trained. We regard the American people, in spite of their strong English ancestry, as so right-minded that they will be on our side when they come to know the whole truth free from falsehoods. Fortunately we are not wanting in other sympathies, and will say nothing of the possibilities of a union with Spain or Mexico to counterbalance things.

Great, indeed, are the sacrifices which we must endure. Our best men—scholars, artists, leaders of industry, generals, and high officials—have fallen upon the field of honor, and many widows and orphans mourn for husbands and fathers. These sacrifices will not be in vain. We know that we conquer, because we *must* and *will* conquer. We are all fighting for honor and existence and such incomprehensible powers have shown themselves in our people as we had no conception of. Hail Germany! We do not wish to rule. We wish only equal justice for all peoples and that we will obtain. The arrogance of Great Britain, in thinking that the sea belongs to

her, has within a hundred years become so deep-rooted that it is now a settled belief. But we, also, wish to maintain our place in the sun, and to build us a fleet which will surpass that of England. This will be the first blessing resulting to us from this war. The English are a domineering race, without honor, brutal, rough, reckless, and of low intelligence (naturally always with exceptions). In many ways also simple and dull; in the common ranks they are very uncultivated. With this sort of people, we must be alert, and, by degrees, must gain the ascendancy. Germany and America should form a friendly alliance; then they could dictate peace to the world and lay a hand upon this malicious and insolent yellow race, before it is too late. This treacherous Albion has sorely transgressed against us and the whole civilized world, while it allied itself with the people of Asia.

I have been somewhat prolix, dear George, and you will indeed think I have said enough. But since from your letter I have gained the impression that in many respects an explanation is needed, I thought I might speak freely from my innermost convictions and I hope that you will not think evil of me. Perhaps I have said too much about the English. As a people they are to be judged not personally, and that I beg you to understand. My judgment applies to them only as a nation, not as individuals, among whom are both good and bad as with us all.

Jan. 3, 1915. Meanwhile we have crossed the threshold of the New Year. I wish you and your loved ones, with all my heart, happiness and God's blessing; may it bring us all peace and rest.

Our Emil is free from military service because he is not strong; George will enter the service in a few days. Two sons of my sister Augusta are in the field and in constant danger. Two cousins, young, hopeful, intelligent men of twenty-five and twenty-seven years of age, have already fallen and the son of my agent is a prisoner in Russia after a night battle. From our city there are over 500 soldiers in the field. All have gone out with great courage to victory or to death. In Germany we have over 600,000 prisoners unwounded—Russians, French, English, and Belgians and their foreign allies. In Austria there are 300,000 Russians and Serbs and all are well treated and cared for, while in the enemy's land interned

Germans have to suffer unheard of things in most disgraceful prisons. Do the Americans know that?

Although there is much grief and sorrow in many families, it is borne not only without complaint, but with valor and high courage, while new heroes and fighters are constantly entering the struggle with joy and enthusiasm. We are not at the end of our strength and will under all circumstances hold out until we gain an honorable peace, since the Right is on our side, the good conscience, and the determination to win.

The Empire must still survive for us.

With heartiest greetings from our whole family to you and all your loved ones, both near and far, I remain in true German faith,
Your devoted cousin,

GEORGE WAGNER.